

A THEOLOGY OF PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN CONGREGATION AND PASTOR

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To Patricia,
I love you always.

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ABSTRACT

Research indicates a pastor's greatest ministry impact in a church occurs in years five through fourteen of a pastorate. Yet, since the 1970's, the average stay of pastors in North American churches has declined from an average of seven years per church to under five years. This has resulted in diminished church growth, diminished trust between pastors and churches and a negative impact upon pastoral families. This study demonstrates the positive steps of partnership church leaders can take in order to strengthen and lengthen the pastor's ministry.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest challenges facing pastors today stems from the many expectations congregations place upon them. George Barna states, "You have to understand their world and the challenges they face. Our studies show that churchgoers expect their pastor to juggle an average of 16 major tasks. That's a recipe for failure – nobody can handle the wide range of responsibilities that people expect pastors to master."¹

With the ministry demands placed upon today's pastors, it is little wonder that many of them struggle to keep their balance and a positive mental attitude. Many develop a form of vocational amnesia as they move through day-to-day tasks and face an unlimited array of congregational expectations. A 1991 report by the Fuller Institute of Church Growth drew the following conclusions about the condition of those serving in vocational ministry.²

90% of pastors work more than 46 hours per week

80% believed that pastoral ministry affects their families negatively

33% said that being in ministry was an outright hazard to their family

75% reported a stress-related job crisis at least once in their ministry

50% felt unable to meet the needs of the job

90% felt they were inadequately trained to cope with ministry demands

70% said they have a lower self-image now than when they started out

¹ Barna Online, "A Profile of Protestant Pastors in Anticipation of 'Pastor Appreciation Month,'" <http://barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=98>, September 25, 2001, accessed October 27, 2007.

² Fuller Institute of Church Growth, "1991 Survey of Pastors" (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1991).

40% reported a serious conflict with a parishioner at least once a month
37% confessed to inappropriate sexual behavior with a person in the church
70% do not have someone they consider a close friend

Such frustrations have led many pastors to move more frequently and in some cases to quit the ministry altogether. Research from Colorado-based Focus on the Family suggests the average length of stay for a pastor today is from three to five years.³ Researcher John C. LaRue reports that since the mid-1970s, pastoral tenure has declined from an average of seven years per church to about five years (four years, eleven months).⁴ George Barna's research has produced similar findings. Barna states, "Our work has found that the typical pastor has his or her greatest ministry impact at a church in years five through fourteen of their pastorate. Unfortunately, we also know that the average pastor lasts only five years at a church – forfeiting the fruit of their investment in the church they've pastored."⁵

We often talk about what a pastor owes a church, but what does the church owe a pastor? What are the responsibilities a church has toward those who preach and lead? How should the church partner with the pastor in a shared ministry? Much of a pastor's success depends upon the partnership of the people he or she serves.

³ Jan Bird, interview by author, telephone consultation, Minot, ND, summer 2001.

⁴ John C. LaRue Jr., "Profile of Today's Pastor, Transitions," *Your Church Magazine* (a publication of Christianity Today) May/June 1995

⁵ Barna Online, "Profile of Protestant Pastors."

Purpose of the Study

This research project examines the place of partnership between pastor and people. It asks: What is the Bible's vision for partnership between those who preach and lead and those who follow? What principles empower the pastor, and how are those principles applied? How can these principles be applied by church leaders?

Typically, when a congregation calls a pastor, a written job description outlining the many various responsibilities is provided. The pastor is then regularly evaluated on the quality of the performance of those responsibilities. Yet, most churches do not have any mechanisms in place to ensure the congregation is fulfilling its responsibilities to the pastor. As we shall see, a two-way partnership between pastor and the people is crucial to the success of both the pastor and the church. No pastor can be expected to "do it all" when it comes to serving the diverse needs of a local congregation. Support and affirmation are often needed and often in short supply. Leadership expert J. Robert Clinton observes, "Clearly, strong leaders as well as weak leaders need ministry affirmation."⁶ While this affirmation can take many forms at the core, Clinton's statement expresses the need for involvement, care, and empowerment for the person charged with the weighty responsibilities of preaching and leading.

The primary audience in view for this thesis-project is the core lay leadership of the local church, that is, the church elder or deacon board. The secondary audience is the congregation as a whole. Congregational size is not of primary importance.

⁶ J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1988), 119.

Importance of the Study

From Scripture, we see that those who lead and those who follow have specific responsibilities toward one another. Both parties need to be biblically informed of these responsibilities and how they can be put into practice. Chapter 2 of this thesis-project will expand on this subject and provide examples for consideration.

The Church: An Interdependent Body

Like the human body, the body of Christ is a living entity. As the individual members of the human body are interdependent, so the individual members of the body of Christ are interdependent. In healthy human bodies, each part of the body performs a needed function which benefits the entire body, not just itself. As each part of the body operates effectively, the total health of the body is improved and maintained. In the body of Christ, each member performs a needed function, and that function is important to the health of the body. Total body function will result when we work interdependently in the work God calls us to.

Improving Understanding

This study is important is because the pastor and the person in the pew may live in different worlds. Apart from Sunday, many people seriously wonder what their pastor does all week. This gap in understanding must be bridged in order to improve the partnership between pastor and people. This thesis-project attempts to shed light on the often unseen world of the pastor. Chapter 3 of the thesis-project will identify specific strategies to empower and position the pastor for success.

Finally, it is the author's belief that churches that are intentional about fulfilling their responsibilities to the person who preaches and leads ultimately benefit themselves. Just as a pastor's success is determined by his or her ability to understand and minister to the needs of a congregation, so a congregation's success is determined by its ability to respond with grace and care to those called to preach and lead. Mutual health is pursued as both parties think and act responsibly toward one other.

Along with thinking and acting responsibly there is a growing awareness among many churches in North America today on the importance of appreciation. Since 1994, Focus on the Family has been active in promoting an annual clergy appreciation month. The organization estimates that 60 percent of North American churches have now participated in some form of clergy appreciation and that it "has opened the eyes of many a congregant who may have, unknowingly, taken the gift of their pastor for granted."⁷ Those who preach and lead need the affirmation and partnership of those they serve to succeed in today's complex ministry environment.

Looking Ahead

Chapter 2 of this thesis-project defines the terms *partner* and *partnership* as they are used in this paper. Chapter 2 will also present a biblical foundation for a theology of partnership through a number of examples found in the Old and New Testaments. Chapter 3 of the thesis-project provides a review of the literature written on this subject and serves as an outline of the positive principles church leaders can use to increase their partnership with the pastor. Chapter 4 of this

⁷ Bird, interview by author.

thesis-project contains a series of lesson plans for presentation to church leaders. The lesson plans spell out specific action steps to build partnership with the pastor. These lesson plans are intended for those in leadership who work most closely with the pastor, typically the elder or deacon Board. The plans form three ninety-minute sessions developed for presentation by a local church leader or an area minister. Chapter 5 of this thesis-project discusses outcomes, conclusions, and recommendations for future use of the developed lesson plans.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

It's been said, "Locusts unite, and Christians should. If we don't, we don't know where our real power is."¹ We find partnerships in almost every area of life, from the worlds of sports and business, to the military, marriage, and government. It's hard to find an effective organization that does not rely upon partnership to get things done. As a largely volunteer organization, the local church requires a great degree of partnership at every level to function correctly. Christ's design for the church is that His people will unite and serve Him together as partners in ministry.

Understanding the Term Partnership

Our English word *partner* is taken from the old Anglo-French word *parcener*, which described people who had become co-heirs of certain lands, buildings, and estates.² A modern definition describes a partner as "a person who takes part in some activity in common with another or others."³ Partnership is defined as "the state of being a partner," having a "joint interest," or as an "association."⁴ Another modern word for partnership is the word *mutuality*. This word carries the idea of "having the same relationship each to the other" and possessing "mutual respect."⁵ Mutuality expresses the idea, "We're in this together."

¹ Haddon Robinson, "The Wisdom of Small Creatures" (Preaching Today, tape no. 93).

² Max Warren, *Partnership* (London: SCM Press, 1956), 11.

³ *Webster's New World Dictionary*, 3rd college edition, s.v. "partner."

⁴ *Ibid.*, s.v. "partnership."

⁵ *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th ed., s.v. "mutuality."

The Biblical Basis of Partnership

Our ability to work together and sustain the sacred work of God in the world is a direct result of our association with Jesus Christ. Through our intimate association with Christ, our lives have been opened to a new set of values, priorities, and beliefs.⁶ We have a new identity, and we share this identity with others who have entrusted their lives to Christ. The community of believers we belong to is the church. In this new community, the Apostle Paul reminds us, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."⁷

As equal members of God's family, we share a common life in Christ. In this common life we share is the promised power of Christ's Spirit to live and work together in the work of God. Jesus speaks of this power when He told the first disciples, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."⁸ These words were not spoken in isolation but in the presence of Christ's followers. The witnessing mission of the church would be carried forward by a Spirit-empowered group of Christ-followers.

In order to fulfill the mission Christ puts before us, unity is essential. Near the end of His earthy ministry, Jesus prayed for an enduring unity among His people: "Now I am departing the world; I am leaving them behind and coming to you. Holy Father, keep them and care for them – all those You have given to Me –

⁶ See 2 Corinthians 5:17. Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture references are from the New International Version.

⁷ Galatians 3:28.

⁸ Acts 1:7-8.

so they will be united just as we are” (John 17:11 NLT). Commenting on this text, Ramsey Michaels observes, “Unity is sought not for itself, but for the sake of the mission.”⁹ Real unity is the key to mission and the reason Christ prayed such an important prayer over His followers.

Christ’s prayer for those early disciples was also a prayer for us living today. The prayer continues, “I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in Me because of their testimony. My prayer for all of them is that they will be one, just as you and I are one, Father – that just as You are in Me and I am in You, so they will be in us, and the world will believe you sent Me” (John 17:20-21 NLT).

From the early days of the church to the present, Christ’s mission has rested upon the unity of His followers. Christ’s mission in the world literally hinges – it succeeds or fails – based upon our partnership as His people. James Boice reminds us the kind of unity Christ prayed for us when he states, “This unity is not conformity, where everybody is exactly alike. It is not organizational, where everyone must be forced into the same denomination. The worst times in the history of the church have been when everyone has been part of one large organization. It is not that kind of unity. The unity for which Jesus prayed is a unity patterned on the unity of the Father and the Son. That is, it is a unity of mind, will, love, and purpose. That unity is what the church should experience and what the church seemed to have achieved in these early days.”¹⁰

⁹ Ramsey Michaels, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 299.

¹⁰ James M. Boice, *Acts—An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997), 92.

Corporate versus Solitary Faith

As Christians, we are called to express faith that is personal but never solitary. Throughout the Bible, faith is consistently expressed as a corporate activity. In fact, the word *saint* never appears in the Bible in the singular form. It appears only the plural form.

An example of this communal aspect of faith is found in the prayer known to us as the Lord's Prayer. This prayer contains six petitions, three directed to God and three directed to human needs. The personal pronouns are all plural. The prayer reads, "*Our* Father in heaven," not, "*My* father in heaven." The prayer continues, "Give *us* our daily bread," not, "Give *me* my daily bread." Near its conclusion the prayer states, "Lead *us* not into temptation but deliver *us* from evil." The only singular pronoun in the prayer comes near the very end with the words, "*Your* kingdom come, *Your* will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," followed with the words of doxology, "For *yours* in the kingdom, and the power and the glory, forever." This biblical pattern for prayer clearly instructs us to pray with the community of faith in view.

Christ's initial followers learned the importance of community early. They lived and served together for the better part of three years. Luke reports that as Jesus traveled about from place to place, "The Twelve were with Him" (Luke 8:1). It's apparent that the disciples were never far from one another or from Jesus. They shared meals, and they shared ministry, being sent out by Jesus "two by two." Their very existence exhibited community and partnership. This intimate sharing of life became a way of life and continued far beyond their years with Jesus.

Prior to His ascension, Jesus asked the disciples to wait together in Jerusalem for the arrival of the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit came (see Acts 2), He moved the unity and partnership of the disciples to a new level. Immediately, they began to carry the gospel message to the world, with Peter preaching the first Christian sermon (see Acts 2:14-41). The results were astounding. Thousands of new believers “joined with the other believers and devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, sharing in the Lord’s Supper and in prayer.”¹¹ The church was born!

The early church continued to grow with the Lord and added daily to the number of the saved. Without question, the sustained unity of the growing church made it possible to organize as an institution and carry the gospel message forward into the Roman Empire. The result of the sustained partnership of the early Christians is astounding – by the end of the first century, the good news reached the farther points of the ancient world.

Christ’s earliest followers learned the importance of working together from Christ’s admonitions, such as, “Your love for one another will prove to the world you are My disciples,”¹² “The greatest love is shown when people lay down their lives for their friends,”¹³ and, “You are my friends if you do whatever I command you.”¹⁴ The earliest generations of Christians turned these words into principles, and this fact helped them to communicate the gospel to the world.

¹¹ Acts 2:42.

¹² John 13:35.

¹³ John 15:13.

¹⁴ John 15:14.

Our understanding of the biblical basis of partnership can be further enhanced by looking at the model partnership of the Trinity and selected positive examples of partnership in the Old and New Testament.

The Model Partnership – The Trinity

It is in the person of God that we find the clearest basis for partnership among pastor and people. The doctrine of the Trinity states there is one living and true God who exists in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. James Boice observes, "It is common among Christians to divide the work of God among [these] three persons, applying the work of creation to the Father, the work of redemption to the Son and the work of sanctification to the Holy Spirit." Boice suggests a more correct way of speaking is to say, "Each member of the Trinity cooperates in each work."¹⁵ The Scriptures are filled with examples of this truth. The following examples illustrate the joint work of the personal agents of the Trinity.

The Partnership of the Trinity in the Believer's Salvation

In Romans 8 we read, "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."¹⁶ This passage records all three members of the Trinity at work. Each is

¹⁵ James M. Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 115.

¹⁶ Romans 8:3-4.

actively involved in accomplishing the work of the believer's salvation. The members of the Trinity work individually as well as corporately. Their work is consistently united and simultaneous. The passage reveals God the Father dispatching the incarnate Christ into the world and the Son honoring the request to take the world's judgment for sin upon Himself. We see the work of the Spirit indicated at the end of the verse as He is revealed as the sustainer and director of the Christian's life. The image is a clear picture of partnership.

In Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus we again see this partnership in action. Paul writes, "You were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory."¹⁷ The Apostle adds, "God, who is rich in mercy . . . made us alive together with Christ and raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."¹⁸ The Scriptures here testify to the joint work of the members of the Trinity in accomplishing the believer's salvation.

Paul affirms this truth once again as he tells the believers at Thessalonica, "We . . . give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."¹⁹ Here, Paul affirms the believer is chosen for salvation by the plan of God, set apart from sin by the Spirit of God, and called to share in eternal glory with the Son of God. The members of the Trinity are displayed as working together in achieving the believer's salvation.

¹⁷ Ephesians 1:13-14.

¹⁸ Ephesians 2:4-6.

¹⁹ 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14.

The Partnership of the Trinity – Additional Examples

Additional examples of the Trinity's partnership are found at the baptism of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, the atonement of Christ, and the issuing of the Great Commission (see Matthew 3:16-17; 1 Corinthians 6:14; John 2:19; 1 Peter 3:18; Hebrews 9:14; Matthew 28:19). These texts illustrate the permanent, sustained partnership of God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The ideal model of partnership is presented in the example of the Trinity. The unity of the Godhead serves as the ultimate model for our work together as followers of God.

Partnership in the Old Testament

One of the clearest examples of partnership in the Old Testament is the record of the insight given to Moses by his father-in-law, Jethro, in Exodus 18:13-23. This wise division of labor is recognized to the present day by efficiency experts. The account begins with Jethro observing the long lines of Israelites coming to Moses for instruction and judicial settlements. It was clearly a lengthy and wearisome process that required Moses to hear countless complaints and settle disputes. "The people stood before Moses from morning until evening" to inquire of God whenever they had a difficulty (Exodus 18:13). Moses served as a judge, instructing the people in "the statutes of God and His laws" (16). The people had a right to be heard by Israel's leaders, but the real problem stemmed from placing this exacting burden on just one individual. The sheer volume of people accompanied by the weight of their many concerns was beyond one person's capacity.

After observing the effects this work was having upon Moses, Jethro proposed a change in Israel's leadership structure. The change would invite partnership into the process of hearing and judging the people. Jethro offered a challenge to Moses: "This is not good! You're going to wear yourself out – and the people, too. This job is too heavy a burden for you to handle all by yourself" (17-18). Jethro offered a new plan involving partnership by saying to Moses,

You should continue to be the people's representative before God, bringing Him their questions to be decided. You should tell them God's decisions, teach them God's laws and instructions, and show them how to conduct their lives. But find some capable, honest men who fear God and hate bribes. Appoint them as judges over groups of one thousand, one hundred, fifty and ten. These men can serve the people, resolving all the ordinary cases. Anything that is too important or too complicated can be brought to you. But they can take care of the smaller matters themselves. They will help you carry the load, making the task easier for you. If you follow this advice, and if God directs you to do so, then you will be able to endure the pressures, and all these people will go home in peace.²⁰

Moses' job had become an impossible, overwhelming task. The solution was a clear plan of partnership. Additional, capable leaders were to be selected and brought into the action.

Another Old Testament illustration of partnership is presented in the book of Nehemiah. During Nehemiah's time, the Persian Empire dominated the Near Eastern world and the Jews were living in exile from their homeland. Many, including Nehemiah, were in captivity in Babylon. Although he was living in exile, Nehemiah held an important position, serving as the trusted cupbearer and confidant of King Artaxerxes. Despite his role in the palace, Nehemiah longed to return to his homeland and restore the walls of Jerusalem destroyed by the Babylonians in 522 B.C. Nehemiah was granted an extraordinary, unexpected opportunity when he

²⁰ Exodus 18:19-22 (NLT)

requested permission from the king to pursue the work of rebuilding the city walls of Jerusalem. The king granted this request of Nehemiah, and a great task was about to begin.

The idea of rebuilding the walls of a conquered city invited stiff opposition from Nehemiah's detractors. Nehemiah encountered at least seven attempts to stop his efforts to rebuild the city's walls. Seeking divine guidance, Nehemiah prayed for a solution. He would initiate a new plan to rebuild the broken walls. This new plan demonstrates the greater possibilities of partnership. Nehemiah executed a plan placing half of the servants on the wall reconstruction and the other half on defensive positions around the workers for protection. The rebuilding efforts were steady (see Nehemiah 4). The division of labor reduced the number of workers significantly, yet the project moved on to completion in fifty-two days! The partnership of the people proved indispensable to success.

Partnership in the New Testament

We earlier noted Christ's earnest prayer for unity recorded in John 17. This prayer is a clarion call to partnership among believers in every generation. Let's consider the words of Christ's prayer once more.

And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in you; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that you sent Me.²¹

²¹ John 17:21-23.

This prayer is an unmistakable reminder of the importance of our unity and unity's importance to our mission. John MacArthur comments, "Everything that relates to salvation, the church, and the kingdom of God is based on the concept of unity."²² In Christ's prayer, we see clearly that we are called to unity and through that oneness to an enduring partnership in mission.

The Apostle Paul and the Church at Corinth

The Apostle Paul's relationship with the Corinthian congregation demonstrates an extraordinary commitment to oneness. Paul elects to serve this congregation without pay because of his commitment to the gospel. He writes, "In the same way, the Lord gave orders that those who preach the Good News should be supported by those who benefit from it. Yet I have never used any of these rights. I am not writing this to suggest that I would like to start now . . . I am compelled by God to do it. How terrible for me if I didn't do it!" (see 1 Corinthians 9:1-18). In the Corinthian letter, Paul argues that he and the other apostles had a right to financial support from the churches they began, yet he is committed to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."²³ Paul values relationships more than a paycheck. His desire for partnership is clearly evident. Partnership in ministry often calls us to go the extra mile in order to accomplish something great for God.

²² John MacArthur, *New Testament Commentary on Ephesians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 129.

²³ Ephesians 4:3.

The Apostle Paul and the Church at Philippi

One of the most enduring examples of partnership in the New Testament can be found in the relationship between the Apostle Paul and the believers at Philippi. The letter of Philippians is essentially a thank-you note from Paul expressing his thanks to these believers for their partnership in his ministry. At the beginning of the letter Paul specifically identifies the Philippians as partners in ministry. The word for "partnership" appears at verse 5 and comes from the Greek word *koinonia*, which can be translated either as "partnership," "fellowship," or "participation."²⁴ The preferred translation is "partnership," and it carries the idea of "one who shares, takes part in, or is associated with another in a giving and receiving relationship."²⁵

The Christians at Philippi were partners with Paul in several distinct ways. They were partners in sharing the good news and in exchanging sympathies. The Philippians were also financial partners with Paul as they supported his ministry with their gifts.

The Apostle Paul and the Church at Ephesus

The Apostle Paul's words to believers at Ephesus underscore the divine plan of partnership between pastors and church members as we serve together in the work of God. Paul states,

It was he [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

²⁴ Sakae Kubo, ed., *A Reader's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), 188.

²⁵ Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 3:797.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.²⁶

These statements reveal how believers are interconnected and called to serve and work together in order to move toward Christian maturity.

The Body Metaphor

Howard Hendricks states, "The church is neither a building nor a business, but a *body* – the body of Christ."²⁷ In the New Testament books of Romans, Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians, we find more than thirty references to "the body of Christ."²⁸ This metaphor provides us with an apt description of how God has designed the church to function. As our physical bodies form a single unit but are composed of many different parts, so the "body of Christ" is a single unit comprised of many different parts. We are reminded by the Apostle Paul of the indispensability of each part:

Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. If the foot says, 'I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand,' that does not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear says, 'I am not part of the body because I am only an ear and not an eye,' would that make it any less a part of the body?"

With humor, Paul continues, "Suppose the whole body were an eye – then how would you hear? Or if your whole body were just one big ear, how could you smell anything? But God made our bodies with many parts, and he has put each

²⁶ Ephesians 4:11-16

²⁷ Howard Hendricks, *Exit Interviews* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1993), 20.

²⁸ Gene Getz, *Building Up One Another* (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2002), 7.

part just where He wants it. What a strange thing a body would be if it had only one part! Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. The eye can never say to the hand, 'I don't need you.' The head can't say to the feet, 'I don't need you.'"²⁹

God's desires full body function in the His body, the local church. The metaphor of the body of Christ reminds us of what the local church is intended to be: a living partnership.

"Showing affection and love to other Christians and treating them as brothers and sisters in Christ does not happen automatically. If it were automatic, we would not have so many exhortations to do so."³⁰ With this comment, Getz refers to the vital "one another" statements of the New Testament. We turn now to an essential review of these statements.

In the Great Commandment we find these words of Jesus: "'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all you soul and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the other commandments and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."³¹ With these words, Jesus summarizes the message of the entire Old Testament. He tells us life's two great goals are to demonstrate love for God and to demonstrate love for one another. This teaching reminds us that at the core, life is relational and love is the divine principle meant to guide us. We live as God intends when we live to love God and love one another.

The many "one another" statements of the New Testament remind us of the call to live relationally. Leith Anderson observes, "The one another theme of the first-

²⁹ 1 Corinthians 12:14-21 (NLT)

³⁰ *Building Up One Another*, 33.

³¹ Matthew 22:37-38.

century church is woven throughout the New Testament. Fifty-eight times in fifty-six verses Christians are connected to one another relationally. In light of this frequency, we can assume that interpersonal connections are a theological priority as well as a sociological necessity.³² The words “we are members of one another” (Romans 12:4) remind us we are a family. The words “be devoted to one another” (Romans 12:10a) and “carry one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:1-2) remind us of our responsibility to one another. The words “Be of the same mind as one another” (Philippians 2:2) and “accept one another” (Romans 15:5) remind us of Christ’s call to unity. When we are challenged to “serve one another” (Galatians 5:13), “admonish one another” (Romans 15:14), and “submit to one another” (Ephesians 5:21; 1 Peter 5:5-6) we hear a call to learn together and walk together. We show love for God and one another when we act in ways to “encourage one another” (1 Thessalonians 5:11). The “one another” statements truly inform our daily actions as they help us honor the Great Commandment in our everyday lives.

Summary

We have observed that partnership in the Body of Christ is supremely modeled by the partnership of the Trinity. The three members of the Trinity operate cooperatively in creating, redeeming, and sustaining life. From the oneness of the Godhead comes our own capacity to live and act as partners in ministry as the Body of Christ. We have also observed living examples of partnership in the pages of the Old and New Testament seeing partnership as the model for effective ministry.

³² Leith Anderson, *Leadership That Works* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1999), 138.

With the strong framework for partnership presented throughout Scripture and with Christ's teaching that partnership is essential to sustain the church's mission, it becomes evident the local church must continually operate on the basis of partnership at every level of its activity.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

In preparation for writing this chapter, the author consulted many books related to partnership in ministry (see the bibliography for a complete list). Of the books reviewed, the author has focused primarily on those dealing with the relationship between elected leaders and the pastor. In this vital association, the practice of partnership is believed to be the most critical. The literature surveyed also includes a review of books relevant to one of the greatest roadblocks to partnership: conflict. Because conflict is an inevitable facet of church life, it is imperative to identify approaches that will generate positive outcomes.

The literature reviewed for this chapter reveals a number of helpful steps that church leaders can use to serve as partners with the pastor. From these, the author has identified three crucial tasks.

The first task involves respecting the humanity of the pastor. Church leaders can see the pastor as little more than a “religious professional” hired to fill an important position. When this occurs, a pastor’s humanity is reduced, and joys associated with serving are also reduced. In addition to seeing the pastor as a person, it is important for church leaders to remember the great value a pastor brings to the church by looking at some of the vital tasks that pastors perform.

Second is the need to develop a spiritual-gifts-based ministry. The idea behind this kind of ministry is that all of God’s children possess spiritual gifts and are called to serve Christ with those gifts. This philosophy of every-member-in-ministry, embraces the biblical model of body life in which each member contributes to the common good by sharing a unique contribution. A spiritual-gifts-based ministry

allows the pastor to focus on individual strengths and important goals because such a ministry creates a healthy division of labor within the church family.

A third task for church leaders is to recognize the inevitability of conflict and the necessity of finding approaches for desired outcomes.

The rest of this chapter will consider each of these tasks in turn.

Respecting the Pastor's Humanity

The typical pastor, writes one author, "is overwhelmed, not with love, but with problems . . . pastors are real people with real pain and real problems."¹

Viewing the pastor as a person includes getting to know the pastor's heart, allowing transparency, giving the gift of time, and offering encouragement.² Such help is needed because in the heat and activity of ministry, pastors can lose sight of their own humanity. Author Gary Harbaugh concludes, "Most of the problems pastors experience . . . are not caused by the pastor forgetting he or she is a pastor. Most difficulties pastors face . . . arise when the pastor forgets that he or she is a person. . . . Pastors are persons."³ Harbaugh offers a "holistic model" that identifies five elements of a pastor's life. The first element is the pastor's physical personhood. The second element is the pastor as a thinking person. The third element is the pastor as a feeling person, the fourth as the pastor as a relating person, and the fifth of the pastor as a choosing person. Harbaugh stresses the need to relate to the pastor on each of these levels as a way of honoring the pastor's humanity.

¹ Jane Rubietta, *How to Keep the Pastor You Love* (Downers Gove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 19, 21.

² Dan Reiland, *Shoulder to Shoulder* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), chap. 2.

³ Gary Harbaugh, *The Pastor As Person* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 9.

As an example of one of these elements, the pastor as a feeling person, Harbaugh observes, "The pastor must be a compassionate and comforting leader in times of grief and bereavement. Yet, the pastor as a feeling person is frequently grieving, too. . . . His grief is real but he is 'the pastor.'"⁴ So, while church members can expect a pastor to care for their feelings, the feelings of the pastor at any given moment can be overlooked or otherwise disregarded by church members. In response, many pastors bury their feelings.⁵ When a pastor continually extends but seldom receives comfort, it has an emptying effect on the pastor's life. With the passage of time, a wide array of negative emotions can appear: anger, fear, depression, and anxiety. It is not easy for many people to envision their pastor as a person capable of possessing such emotions. Most pastors understand this perception but cannot help but desire a level of care in return.

People in the pew are often not familiar with the pastor's world. Many congregants live with a number of myths about the pastor and his work, some of which are listed in *Shoulder to Shoulder* by Dan Reiland. The first myth Reiland deals with is that pastors have an easy job. As a former pastor with considerable experience, Reiland highlights the demanding nature of the pastor's work as he or she serves a human constituency with virtually unlimited needs and great expectations. Pastors live with a sense of the incomplete, the urgent, and the unexpected. Beyond attending the unlimited human needs, there is always another book to read and another sermon or presentation to prepare.

Another myth Reiland addresses is that pastors have a model family. He suggests that pastors have a stressful family life because they encounter the same

⁴ Ibid., 85.

⁵ Ibid., 86.

pressures experienced by other families in the congregation with the added tension of living under the scrutiny of congregation and community. Slip-ups can spell the end of a pastor's ministry or affect it severely. This negative pressure is felt not only by the pastor but also by each member of the pastor's family.

Another myth Reiland challenges is that pastors are experts in their field. Despite its excellence, seminary training can never prepare a pastor for some of the challenges encountered in the heat of ministry. Most pastors serve their constituents, the church family, twenty-four hours a day. At any moment, a crisis can emerge, and the pastor may be in the middle of a situation that requires skills beyond his training or expertise.

The final myth Reiland addresses is that pastors enjoy the fellowship of many close friends. Despite their close work with people, 70 percent of pastors do not have someone they consider a close friend.⁶ One reason for this is the danger of having close friendships within the church. Although pastors, like all people, need "significant relationships that support personal health, long-term viability and essential values . . . when faced with a conflict, a crisis, or even normal life difficulties, they have no one to talk to. Nobody is there to provide safe and helpful support. Most clergy report that at one time or another they confided in a member of the congregation or a church leader with disastrous results."⁷ The dangers of have their confidences shared inappropriately leads most pastors into a lonely place of isolation. This easily leads to depression, prolonged anxiety, and reduced effectiveness.

⁶ Fuller Institute of Church Growth, 1991.

⁷ Gary D. Kinnamon and Alfred H. Ells, *Leaders That Last* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 52.

Seeing the Value of a Pastor's Service

In addition to developing respect for the humanity of one's pastor, church leaders are wise to reflect upon the important contributions a pastor makes to the local church. In *Becoming Your Favorite Church*, H. B. London and Neil Wiseman outline a few of the major time-consuming tasks pastors pursue in order to fulfill their calling. These include

- building up the body of Christ
- assisting believers in achieving unity in the faith
- expanding a congregation's knowledge of the Son of God
- helping the church attain "the whole measure of the fullness of Christ"
- protecting a congregation from deceptive teaching
- challenging the congregation to speak the truth in love
- stimulating love in the body of Christ
- seeing that each member is built up in the faith.⁸

The apostle Paul echoes the importance of these major tasks when he writes, "Dear brothers and sisters, honor those who are your leaders in the Lord's work. They work hard among you and give you spiritual guidance. Show them great respect and wholehearted love because of their work. And live peacefully with each other."⁹

⁸ H. B. London Jr. and Neil B. Wiseman, *Becoming Your Favorite Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2002), 107.

⁹ 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13.

Granting Time for Fruitfulness

A number of writers identify the need for a pastor to take time to tackle the major tasks of ministry. They also reveal an alarming trend: the longevity of pastors is decreasing across denominational lines. London and Wiseman write, "The typical pastor has his greatest ministry impact in a church in years 5 through 14 of his pastorate; unfortunately, the average pastor lasts only five years at a church."¹⁰ Gary McIntosh echoes this. His research among several mainline denominations found that "a pastor's most effective years in a pulpit don't even begin until the sixth or seventh year."¹¹ Thom Ranier, dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, concludes the average tenure for all Protestant ministers is now 2.3 years.¹² Rubietta states, "With all the leaving, there's no time for cleaving."¹³

In *The Purpose-Driven Church*, Rick Warren states, "A long pastorate does not guarantee a church will grow, but changing pastors every few years guarantees a church *won't* grow. Most healthy, large churches are led by a pastor who has been there a long time."¹⁴ Warren contends that, "Long pastorates make deep, trusting and caring relationships possible. Without those kinds of relationships, a pastor won't accomplish much of lasting value. . . . Few people want to follow a leader who isn't going to be around a year from now. The pastor may want to start all sorts of new projects, but the members will be reticent because they will be the ones having

¹⁰ H. B. London Jr. and Neil B. Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2003), 34.

¹¹ Rubietta, *How to Keep the Pastor You Love*, quoting Gary McIntosh, "Is It Time to Leave?", *Leadership* (summer 1988), 70-75.

¹² Rubietta, *How to Keep the Pastor You Love*, 21; quotation taken from Thom Rainer, *Effective Evangelistic Churches* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 43-44.

¹³ Rubietta, *How to Keep the Pastor You Love*, 21.

¹⁴ Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 31.

to live with the consequences long after the pastor has been moved to another church.”¹⁵

In Warren’s denomination (Southern Baptist), it is reported that 6,000 pastors leave the ministry each year and 225 are fired each month.¹⁶ The author’s present church has demonstrated a history of shorter-than-average pastorates. Current church leaders have identified this history and acknowledged it as a failed approach to growth. Forcing pastors to leave before their time also weakens a church’s reputation in the community and among prospective future pastors.¹⁷

The literature discloses a number of important ideas church leaders can implement to prevent early pastoral departures.

In *Leaders That Last*, Gary Kinnaman and Alfred Ells encourage pastors to form “covenant friendships” by joining an association of likeminded clergy. Calling this concept “Pastors in Covenant” (PIC), Kinnaman and Ells explain that the purpose of these groups is to develop a supportive, close-knit community similar to that in the early church (Acts 2:42). The idea is to move pastors away from being “lone-ranger isolationists” and into a setting where they can meet regularly to “break bread together, pray together and learn together.”¹⁸

Church leaders can acknowledge the need of the pastor to participate in such a group and allow the time to participate. This time should be viewed as feeding ministry, not detracting from it. Granting a pastor the ability to feed his or her

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Kinnamon and Ells, *Leaders That Last* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), quoting Dr. Fred Gage, 27.

¹⁷ D. Baklenko, interview with author, Minot, ND, December 17, 2006.

¹⁸ Kinnamon and Ells, *Leaders That Last*, 74.

personal faith allows the pastor to keep serving as a true spiritual leader versus being reduced to a church manager.¹⁹

In *Shoulder to Shoulder*, Reiland highlights ten individual steps for church leaders to embrace the pastor's humanity:

Remember that God created your pastor on purpose with a specific plan in mind. Respect and appreciate all that makes him unique.

Recognize and respect your pastor's humanity by forgiving mistakes, encouraging risk, and telling him you believe in him.

Give your pastor permission to be himself.

Encourage your pastor to be fully authentic by first being authentic yourself.

Practice open and honest communication from the heart.

Give your pastor the latitude he needs to be the leader of the congregation.

Allow and encourage your pastor to play to his strengths. Learn his leadership style, personality type, and spiritual gifts; then let him focus on those arenas.

Be an advocate of realistic expectations for your pastor.

Keep focused on the priorities of the church.

Don't put extra demands on your pastor's family.

Encourage your pastor to be faithful to his time off.²⁰

Each of these statements serves as a basic step toward treating the pastor as a person. When church leaders accept and respect the pastor's humanity, they can then set realistic expectations for the pastor. In turn, realistic expectations allow the pastor to

¹⁹ London and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 203.

²⁰ Reiland, *Shoulder to Shoulder*, 36-37.

serve with strength because he is no longer expected to meet an impossible list of behavioral and performance standards. The end result is better personal and professional performance.

Developing a Spiritual-Gifts-Based Ministry

Churches with a spiritual-gifts-based ministry take a great step toward an empowering partnership with the pastor. A spiritual-gifts-based ministry is a philosophy of church ministry based on the concept that every believer is fully gifted for ministry and called to use those spiritual gifts in the body of Christ. The goal of a spiritual-gifts-based ministry is to move members into a ministry until a church reaches near "full employment." Leaders and pastors operate with the core assumption that "on this team, everyone plays." Through training and opportunities for service, everyone is encouraged to find a personal ministry within the church.

A seminal book on the subject of spiritual gifts is *Body Life* by Ray Stedman. Stedman suggests, "It takes the whole body to do the work of the church. Every Christian is endowed with certain gifts promised by the resurrected Christ when He ascended on high to the Father's throne and took over the reigns of the universe. Our task as members of the body is to discover our gifts and put them to work. If anyone neglects his or her gift, the whole body suffers."²¹ Stedman dispenses with the myth that too many Christians believe when they say, "I have no gifts of service." Stedman's statement, "All of God's children have gifts,"²² echoes the apostle Peter's words, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve

²¹ Ray Stedman, *Body Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House, 1995), 196.

²² *Ibid.*, 59-60.

others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."²³ Implicit in Peter's words is the fact that every believer possesses at least one spiritual gift.

The benefit of a spiritual-gifts-based approach to ministry is enormous to the pastor and the church. By creating a healthy division of labor, this model of ministry permits the pastor to serve mainly according to his primary gifts. This is important because of the wide array of tasks a pastor is typically expected to perform. George Barna contends, "Many churches make a grievous mistake: they expect their pastor to be the master of all trades. The expectations set for most pastors doom them to failure before they begin their work." Barna adds, "Our time management study among pastors indicated that the typical pastor juggles an extraordinary number of major tasks (16) during an average week. The result of this burden is that many pastors do a mediocre job in most of those tasks, to the chagrin of the pastor and congregation alike."²⁴

The solution to this problem, writes Barna, is for church leaders to enable "the pastor to succeed by narrowing the focus of the pastor's work."²⁵ This is done by developing a reasonable job description and delegating some of the pastor's ancillary tasks.²⁶ A spiritual-gifts-based ministry will permit some of these ancillary tasks to be assumed by church members whose possess the necessary gifts to carry them out.

As stated earlier, a spiritual-gifts-based ministry benefits more than the pastor; this approach to ministry completes the many tasks of a church's ministry. It addresses what Stedman refers to as a "hungering of individuals after excitement

²³ 1 Peter 4:10.

²⁴ George Barna, *The Habits of Highly Effective Churches* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1999), 37.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 38.

and challenge in ministry.²⁷ As people use their spiritual gifts, they experience the joy and fulfillment that accompanies service to Christ and his family and avoid the dangers that often accompany standing on the sidelines of the church's ministry. As one author notes, inactivity or "unemployment" in a church often forms a breeding ground for negative behavior.²⁸ Leaders uphold the pastor, individual members, and the church as an organization by embracing the biblical vision of "every member in ministry."

Of the many books written on the subject of spiritual gifts, two of the most helpful are *Team Ministry* by Larry Gilbert and *Shape* by Eric Rees. Each book contributes a unique focus to the subject. *Team Ministry* offers detailed descriptions of the spiritual gifts listed in the New Testament and the book has a corresponding assessment tool available in print form or in a free online version. Both the book and the assessment tool contribute helpful information to people who have never taken a serious look at the subject of gifts. The newer book, *Shape*, discusses the subject of spiritual gifts but also examines additional factors that shape our service for Christ. The second lesson plan contained in Chapter 4 will address the SHAPE concept and communicate the value of spiritual gifts in the life of the church in general and the pastor's ministry in particular.

Finding Healthy Approaches to Conflict

One of the greatest roadblocks to partnership in the local church is conflict. Foreseeing the negative possibilities that poorly handled conflict produces in the local church caused the Apostle Paul to write these words of warning to the

²⁷ Stedman, *Body Life*, 220.

²⁸ Marshall Shelley, *Well-Intentioned Dragons* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1994), 45.

Christians living in Galatia: "if you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another."²⁹

A review of literature about church conflict reveals the inevitability of conflict and the responsibility of leaders to carefully engage it. As one writer puts it, "All of the members and especially the leaders of a church, contribute to whether things go in a more positive or negative direction."³⁰

Conflict arises in the local church for a variety of reasons. Kinnamon and Ells state, "Churches are full of conflict because churches are made up of people—needy, hurting, struggling people. And wherever people congregate, conflict and problems arise."³¹ In addition, conflict in the church arises from the fact the local church is a complex environment. In *Leaders that Last*, Kinnaman and Ells contend that while a business is not an army and not a family, the local church is all three at the same time!³² These intrinsic complexities mean that church leaders and pastors must be prepared to deal well with conflict. Drawing from their extensive experience as pastors, Kinnaman and Ells contend the following elements are needed to promote a healthy church culture:

a commitment to manage and resolve conflict

an environment of love, acceptance, and forgiveness

allowing opportunity to learn from mistakes.³³

²⁹ Galatians 5:15.

³⁰ Ronald Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1996), 20.

³¹ Kinnamon and Ells, *Leaders That Last*, 48.

³² Ibid., 44.

³³ Ibid., 47.

According to Kinnaman and Ells, cultivating these elements requires healthy leaders and management systems, including:

a written statement of mission, with goals and strategies to achieve that mission

a list of core values to which leaders agree and to which they make a personal commitment

the role of the governing board and its relationship to the senior pastor (and staff in larger churches)

differences in roles of governance, leadership, and administration

an understanding of how decisions are made

job descriptions for staff and/or volunteer leaders

an annual audit

a policy manual for staff and volunteers

written guidelines for conflict resolution and a commitment by leaders to abide by those guidelines

a fair and equitable system for compensating the pastor (and staff in larger churches).³⁴

In the view of Kinnamon and Ells, those responsible for designing and leading the church's management systems must write these things down because "what people don't understand, they misunderstand."³⁵ Written communication grants us the ability to "inspect what we expect" and work toward reducing the level of conflict experienced in the complex environment of the church.

³⁴ Ibid., 54.

³⁵ Ibid.

In addition to developing healthy approaches to conflict and creating a healthy management system, church leaders need to take a positive path toward conflict resolution when conflict develops.

At this point, church leaders need to be aware of two important strategies. First, leaders must avoid the all-too-common approach of “naming, blaming, and shaming” when conflict arises. Second, they must learn to apply Christ’s important teaching about conflict management (Matthew 18:15).

An unfortunate fact from history is how often Christians play hardball versus softball with one another in the face of conflict. In the fourth century, the Roman historian Marcellinus (c. 330-395) observed, “No wild beasts are so cruel as the Christians in their dealings with each other.”³⁶

There are many books written about church conflict. Among the more important of these is *Never Call Them Jerks* by Arthur Boers. Boers notes that many books tend to perpetuate the long history of harsh dealings among Christians by affixing negative labels to people. Boers’ suggests this behavior only injects more anxiety into already difficult situations.³⁷ While Boers’ arguments on labeling behaviors are well-stated, this author believes some of the books he refers to make a valuable contribution to the subject.³⁸

Boers’s book challenges leaders to bring health versus anxiety to the difficult situations of church life. He writes, “Anxiety adversely affects a community’s health. It magnifies differences and decreases capacity to tolerate or manage differences.

³⁶ Arthur Paul Boers, *Never Call Them Jerks: Healthy Responses to Difficult Behavior* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 1999), 1.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁸ Titles include *Antagonists in the Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988) *Clergy-Killers* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997) and David Augsburger, *Caring Enough to Confront* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1981).

Clarity and objectivity diminish.”³⁹ Boers presents a positive path forward in difficult situations by suggesting that the role of leaders is to offer statements of assurance that a situation can be handled, present a calm and relaxed demeanor and voice, give a clear description of what is happening and what it means, and present an understandable plan to deal with the situation.⁴⁰ Chapter 4 will include a number of exercises that demonstrate how to apply this approach to conflict.

Of the many contributions of *Never Call them Jerks*, one of the best is the book’s definition of Christian community offered by David Augsberger. This definition states that a normal community, when it is faithful in welcoming its members, contains a host of diverse elements:

- contrasts in relationships
- tensions in relationships
- ambivalence in motivations
- variety in preferences
- diversity in values
- competition for resources
- complexities of human needs
- toxicity in personalities
- immaturity in development.⁴¹

This definition of community is useful because it is grounded in reality. It is not unnaturally optimistic or unduly pessimistic. It points to an obvious truth: these diverse realities will permit conflict in any human organization. Conflict, although it is

³⁹ Boers, *Never Call Them Jerks*, 103.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 105.

⁴¹ Ibid., vi.

inevitable, is not always bad. In fact, it often leads to helpful contributions. Conflict must be managed and controlled because it has the potential to result in positive outcomes.

Among the other books reviewed for this section on church conflict, a particularly helpful resource is *Telling Each Other the Truth* by William Backus. A Christian psychologist, author, and ordained pastor, Backus offers a step-by-step plan for applying Christ's teaching on disputes (Matthew 18). At the heart of this book is an argument for conforming our lives to the standard of truth, God's Word, by adopting the following key steps:

Tell yourself the truth.

Understand the power and effectiveness of maintaining truth in your relationships.

Learn to experience the results of living with truth between people.

Recognize the importance of effort.⁴²

Backus suggests we may live with untruths on a daily basis. All the while, God desires "truth in the inward parts" of our lives. When we know and embrace truth, we experience true freedom. Truth in relationships is important for similar reasons. Just as truth properly believed and used has power to create health in an individual, so it can heal relationships. Truth lived out in relationships with the passage of time produces better relationships that function at higher levels than

⁴² William Backus, *Telling Each Other the Truth* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2006), 16-19.

previously thought possible. Individual effort is critical because, as Backus states, "the one person in the world whose behavior you can control is yourself."⁴³

As one follows the four-step process described above, Backus draws the reader's attention to some important but easily neglected sub-steps of preparation. One example of an oft-neglected step in the process of bringing a dispute to a person that offends us is to humbly accept that "both persons are equal in value and in the validity of their needs, desires, wishes, and feelings."⁴⁴ In practice, Backus finds, "as strange as it may seem, some of my Christian clients deny the equality of persons, confusing it with the issue of authority in the home or in other structures."⁴⁵ Backus coaches Christians on how to approach conflict without presuppositions that easily short-circuit the process of conflict resolution.

In this author's view, the highlight of this book is chapter 8, "The Four Elements in Telling Him His Fault." Relying on Matthew 18:15, Backus explains that an offended Christian needs to ponder four areas of consideration before approaching an individual with a grievance. The first issue of consideration is, "What is the core issue of concern here? What precisely has this person done?" The second issue of consideration is, "How has this hurt or upset me?" The third area of consideration is, "What is the result from this person's actions? How has it made me feel?" The fourth and final consideration is, "How can I ask this person to change or respond differently in the future?"⁴⁶

⁴³ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 120.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 125.

After thinking about the issues, one needs to tell the other person

- what he has done
- how it hurt or upset you
- the consequences (if any)
- what you want the other to change or do differently⁴⁷

Additionally, Backus reminds his readers of the importance of scheduling the visit for an appropriate time and place, avoiding put-downs, and avoiding “getting personal” during the conversation. “Getting personal” involves finding fault in the other person as an individual versus identifying a problem with a person’s behavior. The following chapter of this thesis-project will demonstrate this approach to conflict resolution.

Summary

The literature demonstrates how to develop a theology of partnership with the pastor through cultivating respect for the pastor’s humanity, developing a spiritual-gifts-based ministry and adopting healthy approaches to conflict. The following chapter will develop these components into three lesson plans. Each lesson plan will serve as a strategy to support the pastor.

Lesson 1: Developing a Pastor’s Bill of Rights

Lesson 2: Developing a Spiritual-Gifts Based Ministry

Lesson 3: Developing Healthy Approaches to Conflict

⁴⁷ Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT DESIGN FOR SEMINAR

Lesson Plan 1: A Pastor's Bill of Rights

The first lesson in this three-lesson series is the longest of the three, and it is the most participatory. It addresses a subject matter most participants have seldom considered, the subject of a pastor's rights. A person should be selected to serve as a secretary (note taker) for this session.

Objectives

1. By the end of this session, learners will consider the role of the pastor's rights in their relationship to the pastor.
2. By the end of this session, learners will discuss a ten-point sample bill of rights.
3. By the end of this session, learners will have the necessary tools to initiate a bill of rights for the pastor in their ministry context.

Introduction (Instructor's Comments)

When challenged with the statement "no marriage can ever be perfect because human beings are not perfect," the typical young couple in premarital counseling quickly nods in agreement. Yet, what is often accepted on a psychological level is not as easily accepted on an emotional level. Once a marriage passes from the honeymoon phase to the reality phase, both husband and wife face unexpected challenges and one another's warts and weaknesses. The truth that "no marriage is

perfect” and that each person is “only human” will have to be accepted on a psychological level but also at the deeper, emotional level of life.

In a way analogous to marriage, when a church calls a new pastor, the early days are characteristically called the honeymoon period. There are mutual feelings of warmth and good will. Unity prevails. Yet, as it does in marriage, this tranquil period will end. Congregational leaders and the pastor will see one another’s warts and weaknesses. It will become critical for the leaders and the pastor to readjust expectations and maintain an attitude of grace in the relationship.

The source of trouble for many a congregational leader is in area of expectations placed upon the pastor. Performance expectations placed upon the average pastor are many and varied; they are both stated and unstated. Pastors are forced to wear so many hats they can develop a sense of vocational amnesia, forgetting what hat to wear for a particular moment.

One way to address the challenge of placing too many expectations upon the pastor is to develop a bill of rights for the pastor. This concept is discussed in *Becoming Your Favorite Church—What the Church Can Do for God When Pastors, Lay Leaders, and People Work Together* by H. B. London Jr. and Neil Wiseman. London and Wiseman remind us that Western civilizations commonly embrace the need for rights in important areas of life. Examples include civil rights, which guarantee protection for all citizens, and patients’ rights, which charge physicians, medical staff, insurance providers, and hospitals with their responsibilities to sick people. Workers’ rights ensure employees a right to be paid, to be provided with

adequate tools, and to have a safe working environment.¹ London and Wiseman state, "Responsible relationships between pastors and parishioners is the cornerstone for formulating a pastor's bill of rights."² A well-crafted pastor's bill of rights serves to protect a pastor from the danger of too many expectations.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are some of the basic rights of laypersons?

[Note: Answers should be listed on a white board or an overhead. Answers might include "the right to hear the gospel," "the right to feel acceptance," and "the right to serve Christ with one's spiritual gifts."]

2. What are some of the basic rights of pastors?

[Note: Answers should be listed on a white board or overhead.]

The following rights are suggested by London and Wiseman and serve as discussion starters for development of a pastor's bill of rights. The pastor should be considered a participant in this discussion, although he cannot serve as the facilitator. One individual should be appointed to record participants' answers for future decision-group discussion.

1. The Right to Dream (5-10 minutes)

Introduction

Pastors often come to a church with a heart full of dreams. Dreams are possibilities for the future life and health of a church. It is necessary for pastors to

¹ H. B. London Jr. and Neil B. Wiseman, *Becoming Your Favorite Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2002), 176.

² Ibid.

hold a vision of the future and to serve as the keeper and carrier of the church vision. It is important for church leaders to recognize the pastor's responsibility to share dreams for the future and to establish the pastor's right to share vision.

Initial Discussion

Questions for the pastor [answers recorded by secretary]

How do you understand "the right to dream"?

What dreams for your church are most important to you? Name two or three dreams you have for this church.

How can leaders work alongside you in support of your dreams? What can they do to contribute to these dreams?

Group discussion questions [answers recorded by secretary]

What are some of your dreams for this church?

How can the pastor contribute to these dreams?

Conclusion

London and Wiseman remind us, "Dreams are fragile. Before you criticize another person's dream, remember this wisdom from an unknown sage: It [a dream] can be killed by a sneer or a yawn; it can be stabbed to death by a quip and worried to death by a frown on the right person's brow."³ Because dreams are so fragile, they need to be handled with care. Both pastor and leaders need to work in support of one another's dreams through prayer, discussion, and consideration of the possibilities.

³ Ibid., 194.

Questions for reflection (not for open discussion or recording by secretary)

Do you encourage your pastor to dream?

Are you a help or a hindrance to your pastor's dreams?

Are you an affirmer or a foot dragger?

Do you ask, "Why not?" Or "How come?" when you hear about your pastor's dream for your church?

Do you tell your pastor "Go for it!" or do you ride the spiritual bus with your foot on the brake?⁴

2. The Right to Privacy (5-10 minutes)

Introduction

"Compassion and availability make a pastor live in a glass house where the work is never finished but the welcome is expected to be warm at all times. For some inexplicable reason, churches—especially the smaller fellowships—sometimes behave as if they own the pastor and his family."⁵ Here are some questions for the pastor and church leaders.

Questions for the pastor [answers recorded by secretary]

As a pastor, what are your expectations of a right to privacy?

How can responsible lay leaders respect the privacy of your family and encourage others to do the same?

Questions for discussion [answers recorded by secretary]

How can you stand firm for the pastor's family amid questions about the pastor and the pastor's family right to privacy?

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

What has your church done in the past to honor a basic right of privacy for the pastor?

Conclusion

Questions for reflection

Do you or the decision-making group at your church make unreasonable demands on your pastor?

Do you defend the pastor's family when others question lifestyle issues?

In an effort to protect your pastor's time with family, do you ask your pastor tough accountability questions regarding scheduling quality time with family?⁶

3. The Right to Adequate Income (5 minutes)

Due to the sensitive nature of this topic, discussion may be brief and reserved for a time when matters of salary are typically addressed during the church year.

Introduction

The following questions are intended to serve only as discussion starters for later decision making. As church leaders, please spend a few moments answering the following questions.

⁶ Ibid., 197.

Questions for discussion [answers recorded by secretary]

Do we have a system in place to evaluate our pastor's compensation?

Do we know the average compensation of pastors in our community? Are we willing to pay more if we find that we are currently paying less than average?

Do we offer a minimum annual cost-of-living increase?⁷

Conclusion

As we said earlier, these questions are intended to serve as starting points for future discussion whenever salary adjustments for the pastor are considered. These items are food for thought today and consideration for action tomorrow. [The instructor can suggest a person be appointed to research the questions and report findings to the board.]

4. The Right to Continual Professional Development (5 minutes)

Introduction

Christian researcher George Barna states that our "culture redefines itself twice every 10 years."⁸ Clearly, the surroundings and atmosphere of ministry change with time. "As a result, the way we do church needs to keep changing too. Many pastors do not understand how to change or why innovation is necessary. Many even argue that the church must stay the same, since the redemptive work of God is changeless. The challenge is to know the difference between the unchanging message and changing methodologies."⁹

⁷ Ibid., 198

⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, 200.

⁹ *Ibid.*

Questions for discussion [answers recorded by secretary]

How can ongoing spiritual and professional growth for our pastor benefit the pastor and the church family?

How frequently do we grant our pastor the opportunity to attend a clergy conference for upgrading skills? (Attending at least one such event annually should be encouraged.)

How can we strongly encourage our pastor's marital enrichment?¹⁰

Conclusion

To some extent, church health is dependent upon the health and vitality of the pastor. Wise church leaders will encourage the pastor's need for continued enrichment and skill development by providing fresh opportunities for growth along with the needed funding. A step in this process is to bring fresh discussion of the pastor's right to continued professional development at an upcoming meeting of the decision group.

5. The Right of Friendship (5 minutes)

Introduction

Everyone needs friends. Jesus was known as "a friend to sinners"¹¹ and as a friend to his closest associates, whom he affectionately called "friends."¹² Every pastor needs friendships within and outside of the congregation. Friendships keep us

¹⁰ Ibid., 201.

¹¹ Luke 7:34.

¹² John 15:15.

whole. For the pastor, "a friend's help often makes the difference between coping and burning out."¹³

Questions for discussion [answers recorded by secretary]

Do we extend and defend our pastor's right to have a few close friends among the congregation?

How can we affirm our pastor's right to have friends?

How can we encourage our pastor to have a soul friend who will hold him accountable?¹⁴

Conclusion

It is important for church leaders to set the tone for the church to be a permission-granting congregation by permitting the pastor the right of friendship. The promise of dividends is substantial and the actual costs very few. Determine to be a friend to your pastor, and allow members of the church the same opportunity.

6. The Right for Protection from Unrealistic Scrutiny (5 minutes)

Introduction

"Some of the saddest people in the whole world are the grown children of ministers; these children never had the opportunity to develop their own faith and uniqueness. For a lifetime, they have sought the elusive carrot of emotional and spiritual health without finding it."¹⁵

Questions for discussion [answers recorded by secretary]

In what ways can we show support to our pastor's family?

¹³ London and Wiseman, *Becoming Your Favorite Church*, 204.

¹⁴ Ibid., 204-5.

¹⁵ Ibid., 206.

When our pastor's kids behave like kids, what message do we communicate to the pastor and one another?

Do you pray for your pastor's children?¹⁶

Conclusion

We began this discussion pointing to the sad state of some of the grown children of pastors as reported by London and Wiseman. These authors also make the following positive statement: "Some of the most well-adjusted people of faith are those who were loved into wholeness by congregations their pastor-parent served during their childhood and adolescence."¹⁷ Clearly, church leaders and congregations can make a difference!

7. The Right to Fail (5-10 minutes)

Introduction

Perfection cannot be the standard for any pastor. A basic right any church must extend to the pastor is the right to fail. Mistakes will be made. Problems will occur. Only Christ was perfect, and in spite of being perfectly sinless, he was often misunderstood, mischaracterized, and mistreated to the point of death. Both pastors and those in their care (or those in the pew) are called to be a people of grace.

Questions for discussion [secretary records answers]

What is our general attitude toward failure? (Note: not large-scale failure such as infidelity)

Is permission granted to learn from mistakes, to "fail forward"?

¹⁶ Ibid., 207.

¹⁷ Ibid., 206.

How many times should we forgive our pastor for a mistake that he is trying to honestly address?

Conclusion

Considering the challenge Jesus issued to Peter to forgive infinitely as long as there was admission of error, church leaders need to extend every grace to pastors who are trying to benefit from mistakes. To offer less is to ignore the generous grace God releases daily into our own lives.

8. The Right of Passage (5 minutes)

Introduction

Studies suggest as many as one in four pastors has faced a forced termination in the years of his service.¹⁸ These forced terminations produce pain for the pastor and the people that may require years to process. When there is unhappiness surrounding a pastor, leaders can take important steps to protect a pastor's ministry from unfair attacks that further erode the pastor's credibility and effectiveness in ministry.

Questions for discussion [secretary records answers]

What point or points does the apostle Paul seem to be making in the following passage: "Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses" (1 Timothy 5:19)?

¹⁸ Ibid., 210.

[Instructor: In verse 19, Paul's words direct us to protect the reputation of those called to lead in the church from undue scrutiny and frivolous accusations. At the same time, the apostle provides a path forward for rebuking a Christian leader when this action is necessary based upon substantiated facts. Verse 20 definitively calls for such action.]

What are some of the ways churches and church leaders can protect the pastor's reputation from frivolous statements?

How can the church address the common problem of gossip and endorse the practice of "safe speech" among its members?

How can prayer serve as a protection for the pastor?

Conclusion

Church leaders have a critical role in helping a pastor navigate through the various dangers, toils, and snares of pastoral ministry. The challenge for leaders is to remain vigilant in identifying and dealing with activities that have potential to harm a pastor's ministry and end it prematurely. By himself, a pastor can never fully protect himself from the threats faced in ministry. Active and full support is needed from those called to serve alongside the pastor.

9. The Right to Organizational Support (5-7 minutes)

Introduction

The condition of those serving in vocational ministry is a serious concern. The increasing secularization of society has diminished societal respect for pastors. In addition, the rash of public scandals among professional clergy has lowered public

confidence and added to the sense of lonely isolation among those committed to serving with integrity. A church needs pastors who are holy and whole. The following questions are for church leaders.

Questions for discussion [secretary records answers]

What type of support network exists for our pastor at the following levels: within the church, within an association, and within a denomination (if applicable)?

Do we have a clear plan to deal with a “clergy-in-crisis” situation?

How can we keep our minister affirmed and accountable?

Conclusion

As church leaders, determine to provide adequate answers to these questions by recording them in written form. The goal is to have a plan in place to protect a pastor’s life at the spiritual, emotional, and psychological level to ensure vitality in ministry. An additional important goal is to have a plan to engage an unexpected crisis in the life of the pastor if it developed.

10. The Right to Speak Out Against Sin and Injustice (5 minutes)

Introduction

Because “pastors see the firsthand consequences of sins when they show up in the lives of individuals and families,”¹⁹ pastors need to be extended the right to speak against sin and decry the moral condition of church and society. London and

¹⁹ Ibid., 216.

Wiseman state, "Every fair-minded person must encourage his pastor to speak the truth in love as a Christ-exalting corrective."²⁰

Questions for discussion [secretary records answers]

How has American society become more hedonistic today than perhaps ever before?

How can we affirm our pastor's right to speak against sin within and outside the church?

Conclusion

A church honors Christ through an enduring commitment to honor His Word in the lives of individuals. By extending the pastor the right to call people to holy living, church members fulfill their calling to become agents of salt and light in the community.

Session conclusion—instructions to the facilitator: The secretary's notes should be collected, edited, and prepared for future discussion at the next meeting of the church's decision group. A suggestion can be made to address one or two elements of this pastor's bill of rights per meeting for the next several months.

²⁰ Ibid., 218.

Lesson Plan 2: Developing a Spiritual Gifts-Based Ministry

Objectives

1. By the end of this session, learners will be able to explain the acrostic S.H.A.P.E.
2. By the end of this session, learners will describe how spiritual gifts contribute to their own sense of significance and fulfillment.
3. By the end of this session, learners will explain the meaning of the seven motivational gifts listed in Romans 12:6-8 and describe how these gifts can be tools of partnership with the pastor.

Prior to the introduction, the article "Understanding Your Shape" by Rick Warren is to be distributed to each participant. The article introduces the lesson and is to be read aloud by a volunteer at the start of the session. The acrostic S.H.A.P.E. should also be written on a white board and completed by the instructor following the reading of the S.H.A.P.E. article.

Introduction (Instructor's Comments)

To introduce today's session, let's read an article by Rick Warren entitled "Understanding Your Shape."²¹ [Select a reader, and display a copy of *Shape* by Eric Rees for further study.] The acrostic S.H.A.P.E. presents us with a method to understand how the various characteristics of our individual lives combine and "shape" us for service to Christ. [Complete the acrostic on the board as these each letter is explained.] The "S" represents your spiritual gifts. The "H" represents your "heart." The "A" represents your abilities. The "P" represents personality. Finally, the

²¹ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life Daily Devotional* (Lake Forest, CA: PurposeDrivenLife.com)

"E" represents your experiences. These combine in your life to create your unique shape! [Read article.]

Understanding Your Shape by Rick Warren

"You shaped me first inside, then out; you formed me in my mother's womb."

– Psalm 139:13 (The Message)

Only you can be you. God designed each of us so there would be no duplication in the world. No one has the exact same mix of factors that make you unique. That means no one else on earth will ever be able to play the role God planned for you.

If you don't make your unique contribution to the Body of Christ, it won't be made. The Bible says, "There are different kinds of spiritual gifts... different ways of serving...and different abilities to perform service."

One of the most common excuses people give for not serving is "I just don't have any abilities to offer." This is ludicrous. You have dozens, probably hundreds of untapped, unrecognized, and unused abilities that are lying dormant inside you.

Many studies have revealed that the average person possesses from 500-700 different skills and abilities—far more than you realize. Like stained glass, our different personalities reflect God's light in many colors and patterns. This blesses the family of God with depth and variety. It also blesses us personally. It feels good to do what God made you to do. When you minister in a manner consistent with the personality God gave you, you experience fulfillment, satisfaction, and fruitfulness. Using your shape is the secret of both fruitfulness and fulfillment in ministry. You will be

most effective when you use your spiritual gifts and abilities in the area of your heart's desire, and in a way that best expresses your personality and experiences. The better the fit, the more successful you will be. (Copyright 2002 by Rick Warren)

The last paragraph discloses the acrostic formula S.H.A.P.E. Let's listen to this statement again. "You will be most effective when you use your spiritual gifts and abilities in the area of your heart's desire, and in a way that best expresses your personality and experiences." Today, we will focus upon the first term identified in this acrostic—spiritual gifts. The subject of spiritual gifts is addressed throughout the New Testament, most notably in the following texts [write on board]:

I Peter 4:10; Ephesians 4:8, 11-16; 1 Corinthians 12:1; Romans 12:3-8

[Instructor: After writing these passages on the white board, request a volunteer to read each passage. After each passage is read aloud, ask participants to comment on the meaning of each verse and offer a comment on how the passage says something about the idea of partnership. Allow 5-7 minutes in total for the four passages and discussion.]

Now, let's review the Apostle's Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 12:1: "Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant." For the apostle, clearly, ignorance is not bliss when it comes to this subject. The Apostle Peter reached a similar conclusion, as we see in these words in his first letter: "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." What are these men of Scripture telling us? One, every believer has at least one spiritual gift. Two, it's important to have knowledge

of one's spiritual gifts, and three, it's vitally important to be faithful in serving with your spiritual gifts.

From Scripture we can conclude that no believer, including the pastor, possesses all the gifts.²² From Scripture, we may also conclude that healthy body function is promoted by the active use of all the gifts in the body of Christ. The functioning of each part is necessary for the complete function and health of the body.²³

A short study of the spiritual gifts identified in Romans 12:6-8 helps us better understand spiritual gifts and how their function can benefit the entire church community, including the pastor. [Request a volunteer to reread Romans 12:6-8 aloud. Encourage people to listen for the seven different gifts identified in these verses. Write these gifts on the board following the reading of the passage: prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, and mercy.]

Seven spiritual gifts are identified by in this passage. [Note the verbal definitions offered are intentionally brief for time management.]

Prophecy: The New Testament prophet is a forth-teller, telling forth the mind of God. This person speaks God's mind concerning sin and righteousness, often in pulpit ministry. This person possesses the Spirit-given capacity and desire to serve God by proclaiming God's truth.²⁴

Service: The person with this gift has the Spirit-given capacity and desire to serve God by rendering practical help in physical and spiritual matters. The

²² See 1 Corinthians 12:29-31.

²³ See Ephesians 4:11-16.

²⁴ Larry Gilbert, *Team Ministry* (Lynchburg, VA: Church Growth Institute, 1991), 83-84.

person with this gift meets the practical needs of fellow Christians and the church.²⁵

Teaching: The New Testament teacher is a person who communicates knowledge, guides, and makes known or relays facts. This person is not always the person we often think of as a teacher in the Sunday school class but functions as a scholar learning and teaching at an in-depth level.²⁶

Exhortation/Encouragement: The Greek word *parakaleo* means "to admonish, to encourage, to beseech."²⁷ The person with this gift sees practical solutions to common problems and typically offers supportive step-by-step guidance to those in need of counsel or encouragement.

Giving: The person with the gift of giving possesses the Spirit-given capacity and desire to serve God by giving of material resources, far beyond the tithe, to further the work of God.²⁸ This person is sensitive to the financial and material needs of others. This person stands always ready to give.

Leadership: The person with this gift possesses the Spirit-given capacity and desire to serve God by organizing, administering, promoting, and leading the various affairs of the church. This person typically has a dream for the future and is willing to attempt impossible tasks for God.

Mercy: The person with this gift is a comforter who enters into the grief or happiness of others.²⁹ This person goes beyond extending sympathy but shows real empathy, literally experiencing the emotional highs and lows of other people.

²⁵ Ibid., 111.

²⁶ Ibid., 87.

²⁷ Ibid., 93.

²⁸ Ibid., 117.

²⁹ Ibid., 103.

Questions for group discussion (10 minutes)

1. Can you think of some examples of how each of these gifts can benefit the church and complement the pastor's ministry?
2. How aware are you of your spiritual gifts and how they contribute to ministry of your church?
3. How recently and how frequently is training on the spiritual gifts offered in the church?

[Suggestion for future discussion: Suggest the board or decision group discuss the idea of offering periodic church-wide training on the spiritual gifts along with preaching from the pastor.]

Conclusion

In this session, we have been introduced to the concept of our personal shape in ministry, and we have considered a few of the ways our spiritual gifts contribute positively to the Body of Christ and to the pastor's ministry within the Body. Encourage your pastor to make use of your gifts and to offer periodic church-wide training on this subject. Working together, you will form a stronger team for Christ.

Lesson Plan 3: Developing Healthy Approaches to Conflict

Objectives

By the end of this session, learners will explain how conflict can be reduced through:

1. a commitment to avoiding labeling behaviors in the church.
2. application of Christ's teaching on conflict resolution (Matthew 18:15).
3. a definitive church mission statement.

[Note to instructor: The content of this lesson is introduced with the following open-ended questions aimed at discovering learners' attitudes toward church conflict.]

Introduction (5-7 minutes)

Today's lesson begins with introductory questions on the subject of conflict.

1. What is your general attitude toward conflict? How do you tend to react toward conflict? Do you tend to engage or avoid it?
2. Do you feel there are "positive possibilities" arising from conflict? Can you cite an example of a positive outcome resulting from a conflict?
3. Why is it important for church leaders to work together and with the pastor when engaging conflict within the church?

Conflict is one of the greatest barriers to partnership in any organization, including the local church. History teaches us that Christians do not possess the best track record in dealing well with interpersonal conflict. Back in the fourth century, the Roman historian Marcellinus (c. 330-395) observed, "No wild beasts are so cruel as the Christians in their dealings with each other."³⁰ Today, common tactics among

³⁰ Arthur Paul Boers, *Never Call Them Jerks* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 1999), 1.

people of faith are “naming, blaming and shaming” behavior.³¹ [These three terms should be placed on the white board and the following question asked: “Can anyone offer an example of naming, blaming, or shaming behavior?” It should also be noted that naming, blaming, and shaming behaviors contradict the “one another” exhortations found in the New Testament such as “honor one another, love one another, bear with one another.”]

Limiting Conflict by Limiting Behaviors That Produce Conflict:

Labeling

One way to lower conflict among people is to limit the behaviors that generate it. One common behavior that people use when engaged in conflict with others is the use of derogatory labels. Such activity always injects more anxiety into the situation rather than lessens it. Examples of this derogatory labeling include categorizing someone as “a problem person,” “a dragon,” or “a jerk.” Arthur Boers offers the following reasons we should avoid labeling behavior in the church.

1. Labeling itself is difficult behavior. It is a form of uncivil behavior in which people use whatever means available to damage, oust, or destroy one another. By indulging in labeling, we ourselves practice difficult behavior: We become part of the problem.
2. Slippery imprecision. Most books have no rigorous standards from which labels are derived. Labels are merely sophisticated put-downs: schoolyard immaturity translated into churchly vocabulary.

³¹ Ibid., 9-12.

3. Lack of qualification for diagnoses. Few of us are equipped to diagnose the categories used by specialists to categorize problem behaviors.
4. Labeling is destructive. Labeling can harden perceptions of how labeled people are seen.
5. Labeling can be a self-fulfilling prophecy. We can assume that people cannot or will not act differently. If labeled "difficult" or "troublemaker," a person may not choose to act otherwise, or we may fail to recognize changed behaviors when they do occur.
6. Labeling is judgmental. The Gospels are full of sayings and stories in which Jesus warns against being judgmental. "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged" (Matthew 7:1).
7. Labeling reveals our anxiety. When we diagnose [judge] people rather than relationships, we show that our anxiety has increased.
8. Labeling makes it easy to write off others' concerns. Rather than engage real issues and concerns, attend to legitimate needs, and listen to healthy differences, the temptation is to write off the other party's issues, needs, or concerns.
9. Labeling hurts healthy process. Labeling not only reveals anxiety but also injects it into the process. Instead of moving toward calmness, labeling disrupts the healthy resolution of problems.
10. Labeling can be a disguise for projection. Jesus warned against projection by saying, "Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take

the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log of your own eye" (Matthew 7:4-5).³²

A Case Study: The Mistaken Teacher (10-15 Minutes)

In *The Courage to Teach*, Quaker scholar Parker Palmer tells a revealing story about his unhelpful dealings with a "difficult" student. After teaching for twenty-five years, Parker visited a university campus where he was given the opportunity to teach a political science class for an hour. Of two-and-a-half dozen students there, Palmer noticed only the "student from hell." He became obsessed with this student, who slouched at the back of the room, had neither pen nor paper, kept his cap pulled over his eyes, and wore a coat as if he meant to escape at the first possible opportunity. Palmer says, "I committed the most basic mistake of the greenest neophyte: I become totally obsessed with him, and everyone else in the room disappeared from my screen."

Palmer directed all his attention toward the young man, hoping to awaken or to stir some interest or response. But nothing resulted. "I left that class with a powerful combination of feelings: self-pity, fraudulence, and rage." Moreover, he blamed the student.

Later, Parker looked forward to his flight home. When the college van picked him up, he was distressed to see that the driver was—you guessed it!—the "student from hell." Palmer was unhappy at the prospect of spending time with this young man. The driver asked him whether they might talk. Palmer was reluctant but agreed. They had a long conversation, and after that they corresponded for a time.

³² Ibid., 12-13.

The gist of the conversation was that the young man was having great difficulty completing college. His unemployed, alcoholic father made life hard for the youth and actively campaigned to discourage him from studies. The youth looked to Palmer for help and motivation. Palmer saw clearly how this student, like so many students and, we might add, like so many parishioners, was full of fear. "The Student from Hell is not born that way but is created by conditions beyond his or her control," says Palmer.³³

Questions for group discussion (10 minutes)

1. What lessons can be learned about labeling from this story?
2. Do you agree that "the Student from Hell is not born that way but is created by conditions beyond his or her control"?
3. What lessons can be drawn from Christ's example? How did he interact with those who were labeled negatively by society?
4. How can leaders deter labeling behavior among those they lead?

Conclusion

By avoiding the use of labeling behavior and encouraging others to follow suit, leaders not only act responsibly but also stop the anxiety that labeling injects into the life of a church. Accomplishing such a goal is not as easy as it may appear, as the book of James reminds us: "The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell."³⁴ It's incumbent upon church leaders to lead the way in taming the tongue.

³³ Ibid., 15-16.

³⁴ James 3:6-8.

Applying Matthew 18:15 to Interpersonal Conflict

In *Telling Each Other the Truth*, William Backus, a Christian psychologist, author, and ordained pastor, states that while God desires truth in the “inward parts” of our lives, many of us live with untruth on a daily basis.³⁵ He reminds his readers of the importance of conforming one’s life to the perfect standard of truth, God’s Word, by consistently telling yourself the truth, understanding the power and effectiveness of maintaining truth in relationships, learning to experience the results of living with truth between people, and recognizing the importance of effort.³⁶

Questions for discussion (5-7 minutes)

1. What do you think it means to “tell yourself the truth”?
2. Why is it important to cultivate truth in our relationships?
3. Why is effort vital to the process of maintaining truth in our relationships?

It’s important to remember Christ’s instructions on how to deal positively with personal grievances in our relationships. We find this pathway of reconciliation recorded in Matthew 18:15, where Jesus states, “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.” This verse calls us to take our concerns with one another to the source of those concerns. Too often, the human tendency is to discuss our problems with anyone other than the person with whom we are upset. This is an unwise, unbiblical approach that only exacerbates the problem. Jesus gives us only

³⁵ William Backus, *Telling Each Other the Truth* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2006), 19.

³⁶ Ibid.

one option when we experience grievances in our relationships: to “go and show him his fault, just between the two of you.”

Taking the right path with a grievance is seldom easy. Backus suggests four preliminary steps are needed before proceeding. We need to discover answers to the following questions:

“What exactly has this person done?” (This involves identifying the core issue of concern.)

“How has this action hurt or upset me?”

“What has resulted from this person’s actions?” (How has it made me feel?)

“How can I ask this person to change or respond differently in the future?”³⁷

Once these answers are identified, the following step is to turn the answers into thoughtfully worded statements and then tell the person [these statements to be placed on white board]

- what he or she has done
- how that action hurt or upset you
- what are the consequences (if any)
- what you wish to see change in the future.³⁸

Role-Play Exercise

[Invite participants to select a partner for a simple role-play exercise. Partners will take turns acting as the “offended” brother or sister as they apply the four steps above. Encourage participants to use an imaginary grievance or draw from one of

³⁷ Ibid., 125.

³⁸ Ibid.

the following examples: the breaking of a confidence, the failure to keep a stated promise, or a failure to issue forgiveness when it should be granted. Allow ten minutes for this exercise.]

Questions for group discussion (10 minutes)

1. Was the role-play exercise easier or more challenging than you anticipated? What specific challenges did you encounter?
2. What is the right setting for such an encounter with a fellow Christian?
3. Why are the elements of timing, location, and privacy important?
4. What are the benefits of “telling each other the truth”?

Conclusion

Most people are uncomfortable with confrontation with other people. Still, we must acknowledge that Scripture does not provide an alternative approach to basic conflict resolution. The only other approaches supplied by Scripture are simply an expansion of Matthew 18:15 (see verses 16-17).

Healthy relationships operate on trust based upon truth. Maintaining healthy relationships will require us to carefully, prayerfully apply Christ’s teaching in order to maintain truth in our relationships. As we embrace this challenge, it is important to remember ultimately, “the one person in the world whose behavior you can control is yourself.”³⁹

³⁹ Ibid., 19.

Reducing Conflict Through a Stated Mission

One of the most effective ways to reduce conflict in any organization, including the church, is to have a clear statement of mission along with written policies and procedures. Such written communication is vital because “what people don’t understand, they misunderstand.”⁴⁰

Pastors and pastor advocates Gary Kinnaman and Alfred Ells remind us the local church is a complicated environment, unlike any other organization. The church is not simply “a business,” “an army,” or “a family.” It is all three at the same time!⁴¹ In light of this fact, Kinnaman and Ells assert a healthy church culture requires the following: a commitment to manage and resolve conflict; an environment of love, acceptance, and forgiveness; and opportunities to learn from mistakes.⁴²

Kinnaman and Ells suggest that pastors and leaders work together to create a system of management that includes the following elements (refer to the Ten-Point Checklist for Church Leaders). [Instructor: This checklist can be distributed either at the start of this lecture or at this point in the presentation. Participants should be asked to take turns reading each statement aloud in preparation for discussion.]

A Ten-Point Checklist for Church Leaders

1. A written statement of mission, with goals and strategies to achieve that mission
2. A list of core values to which leaders agree and to which they make a personal commitment

⁴⁰ Kinnamon and Ells, *Leaders That Last*, 54.

⁴¹ Ibid., 44.

⁴² Ibid., 47.

3. The role of the governing board and its relationship to the senior pastor (and staff in larger churches)
4. Differences in roles of governance, leadership, and administration
5. An understanding of how decisions are made
6. Job descriptions for staff and/or volunteer leaders
7. An annual audit
8. A policy manual for staff and volunteers
9. Written guidelines for conflict resolution and a commitment by leaders to abide by those guidelines
10. A fair and equitable system for compensating the pastor (and staff in larger churches).⁴³

[The following discussion can take place in either in a small-group setting (by dividing participants into small groups) or in the full assembly. Determination is left to the discretion of the instructor.]

Evaluation Exercise

Discuss and rate your church's progress in relationship to each element on the checklist using the following numbering system.

- 4 – Yes, we have achieved and implemented this step.
- 3 – We have achieved notable progress in achieving this step.
- 2 – We have achieved a small amount of progress in achieving this step.
- 1 – No, we have not yet begun this step.

⁴³ Ibid., 54.

[Results can be reported at the end of the discussion time or turned in for future discussion of the church's decision group.]

Written communication in each of the above areas provides churches and church leaders a consistent, agreed-upon matrix for decision making. In turn, this provides direction for ministry and the ability to work together toward common goals. One of the great benefits to a church organized is that it tends to reduce conflict. "What people don't understand, they misunderstand."⁴⁴ Responsible leaders can address that challenge by implementing each of the elements discussed here.

Conclusion

Conflict threatens the partnership in the local church only when leaders fail to respond to it. Responsible leaders manage conflict by taking a positive versus negative approach to conflict resolution. This includes avoiding the tactics of naming, blaming, and shaming. using Scripture texts such as Matthew 18:15 to resolve conflicts between church members. creating a healthy church management system with the use of written communication of mission, goals, values, and practices.

Summary

The information presented in this final session should serve as a starting point for future discussion and decision making by church leaders. In the coming months, church leaders are encouraged to engage further the ideas presented in this

⁴⁴ Ibid.

lesson. The purpose of continued discussion is to identify appropriate priorities for further action along with appropriate action steps.

As church leaders articulate the church's mission and methods at greater levels of clarity, overall ministry effectiveness is enhanced and natural tendencies toward conflict are reduced.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

The author taught the preceding material to a group of twenty to twenty-five ministry leaders at First Baptist Church in Bismarck, North Dakota, during three Wednesday evening sessions. The particular church is a thriving American Baptist Congregation served by an effective, long-term pastor.

Each evening session ranged from ninety minutes to two hours in length. At the close of the third presentation, participants completed an evaluation form (See Appendix A) providing written comments on each of the three sessions and made suggestions for improving the seminar.

From the written responses, it became apparent this seminar was deemed useful by those who participated, especially the church's senior pastor. At the conclusion of the last presentation, he informed me the seminar reinvigorated his perspective on his church and his ministry.

Comments critiquing the seminar suggest it can be improved by adding a homework element, more role playing exercises, and a list of the books referenced during the seminar for further reading. Before teaching this seminar again, the author will implement each of these suggestions and redefine the stated goals for each session in an effort to make them more measurable.

When asked how the sessions could be more effective, one comment was, "[The] only way they [the sessions] will be effective is if we all become more serious in working with our family of God here and with Pastor and his family." This comment evidences ownership of the ideas presented in the seminar and a sincere desire to apply them.

One surprise in the evaluation comments was the interest in the first lesson's subject, "Developing a Pastor's Bill of Rights." There was clearly more receptivity to this proposal than the author anticipated from comments in the evaluations. One person stated, "The bill of rights was useful information—it's important to hear what is needed from the pastor's perspective." Another person commented, "We don't think about this subject often." Another individual observed that each of the seminars "provided fresh ideas to move forward." Comments following the final presentation suggested there was much interest in applying the ideas presented in the three lessons. The pastor indicated a strong desire to lead the way in initiating future steps of application.

As a result of writing this thesis and presenting this seminar, the author is again reminded of how many committed laypeople are relatively unaware of the practical contributions they can make to support the pastor. Often, people live with a limited view of their pastor's humanity. The pastor is seen as a caricature of who she or he really is. Parishioners, including church leaders, envision pastors as indefatigable men and women who do not experience the same encumbrances of life as do "ordinary people." This lack of awareness produces a lonely environment for many pastors. Living and working in a sense of emotional isolation, pastors serve day to day amid a turbulent sea of great expectations. Writing this thesis and presenting the seminar demonstrate how receptive people can be to supporting their pastor through practical, meaningful steps, including the service of their spiritual gifts and protecting the pastor's personal and family reputation.

The process of writing this thesis has been a journey. This author entered the Doctor of Ministry program at Gordon-Conwell Seminary in the same year he

entered responsibilities to the office of senior pastor in his present church. The learning curve associated with the demands of a senior pastor role, the rigors of doctoral studies, and the frequent challenges of raising a young family have filled the days and nights.

This stretching experience has further demonstrated the need for partners in life and ministry. Pastors and congregations alike must remember that pastors are not called to be lone (or lonesome) rangers. Pastors require the support of those called to work most closely to them, the church's leadership board or primary decision-making group. The pastor's success and survival in ministry is linked to the health of the relationships within that group. When a sound theological understanding of partnership is operative, the blessings of unity are present and will impact the entire people of God.

Too often in pastoral ministry, there is division in the ranks, either among leaders, among staff, or between church leaders and church staff. This division all but stops significant service to Christ. Church leader and pastor together must remember our Lord's words: "Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall" (Luke 11:17).

Leaders in ministry must choose to embrace Christ's call to yoke together and work as those committed to true partnership. To answer this challenge is to embrace the call Christ places upon us and to live in the joy produced from living within our God-given unity.

Appendix A

Seminar Evaluation Form

Seminar: Three Strategies to Support the Pastor

Name _____ Date _____

The Sessions

- I. Developing a Pastor's Bill of Rights – This session discussed some of the essential rights a congregation should extend to a pastor along with discussion of London and Wiseman's Ten-point Bill of Rights (Examples: "The right to dream," "The right to privacy," "The right to adequate income").
- II. Developing a Spiritual-Gifts-Based Ministry – This session presented the merits of a spiritual-gift-based-ministry as the biblical model for ministry and suggested "every-member-ministry" is a key component in supporting the pastor.
- III. Developing a Healthy Approach to Conflict – This session presented the four stages of team development, the importance of a common mission and vision for the church, and the role of Matthew 18 in resolving church conflict.

1. Looking back, what session (or sessions) did you find most useful or interesting? Why?

2. What session (or sessions) did you find the least useful or interesting? Why?

3. What questions about partnership with the pastor do you have that were not addressed at all or adequately? Is there a segment that should be expanded, reduced or excluded?

4. What could improve the sessions in how they are presented? (Would homework assignments have been helpful? More small group discussion? Other ideas?)

5. Do you have any final thoughts on how the sessions could be more effective?

Other comments:

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Internet Resources

Spiritual Gifts Assessment tools –

Ephesians Four Ministries, Church Growth Institute, Lynchburg, VA,
www.churchgrowth.org/analysis/intro.php

Purpose Driven Ministries, Lake Forest, CA
www.shapediscovery.com

www.servingcentral.com/assessment/

VITA

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